

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



CONTENTS

April MCMXXVIII

PLAYS OF THE MONTH, BY E. A.
BAUGHAN ▯ THE IBSEN CEN-
TENARY LECTURES REPORT ▯
MODERN JEWISH DRAMA ▯
▯ VILLAGE PLAY PRODUCTION ▯ ILLUSTRATIONS

6d.

Published by
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
8 ADELPHI TERRACE
LONDON
W.C.

2

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
GENERAL LIBRARY

Robert Young

(Manager to the late Arthur Bourchier, and
now producing for the Lena Ashwell Players)

PLAY CRITIC & PRODUCER

Expert critical advice on all
plays submitted

SELECTED PLAYS PLACED
FOR PRODUCTION

Fee - £1 1s. 0d.

Apply (by letter)—

STRAND THEATRE, W.C.2

TO LET

SUPERB RIVER-FRONT
SUITE
IN ADELPHI TERRACE

Equally adapted for
private residence or
business

For Terms apply to:

THE HON. SECRETARY,
BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE,
8 ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON,
W.C.2

THE BEHNKE SCHOOL

Voice Training for Singers and Speakers.
Stammering and Defects of Speech treated.
Classes for Clergy and Actors. Teachers trained.
AND

THE KATE EMIL-BEHNKE STAGE SCHOOL

Scientific Training of Voice and Body. Acting
Classes, LILIAN BRAITHWAITE, ROBERT
ATKINS. Fencing, PROFESSOR GRAVE.
Dancing, Mime, GINNER-MAWER. Lecturers:
CLEMENCE DANE, ROY HORNIMAN
Children's classes.

Principal: Kate Emil-Behnke (author of "Singers'
Difficulties," Cassell) 39 Earl's Court Sq., S.W.5

THE GREENLEAF THEATRE

Students of the Drama League Easter
School

who will be attending Constance Smedley's Lecture on
Speech, Action and Production (Saturday, April 16th, at
2.30 p.m.) are advised to read her text-books first.

GREENLEAF ELEMENTS

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. ACTION | } DUCKWORTH |
| 2. SPEECH | |
| 3. PRODUCTION | |

or from the Drama League bookshop. 6s. each.

SCHOOLS FOR AMATEUR PRODUCERS, 1928

under the direction of

THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

April 18th to May 2nd | August 8th—22nd
AT CHELTENHAM | AT WELLS

Lectures and Practice in Dramatic Art, special
attention being given to the problems of Village
Production. Study and performance of a modern
play, and of scenes from a Shakespeare play.
At Wells, Mr. Laurence Housman will produce
one of his own plays.

Lecturer and Producer—Mrs. GIBSON, L.R.A.M., Elocution
FEE—TWO GUINEAS. CHEAP ACCOMMODATION.

For further particulars apply to:—

The Hon. Sec. VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY, 15 PECKHAM ROAD, S.E.5

THEATRE CRAFT SERVICES

17 EXCEL HOUSE, WHITCOMB STREET, W.C.2

COSTUMES designed and executed for entire
productions (Professional or Amateur) or for
individual wear

STAGE SETTINGS and LIGHTING designed
and executed, and entire productions staged and
rehearsed by Professional Coach

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION given to each
order by a Fully Qualified Specialist, on each
branch of the work, in both Historical Accuracy
and Modern Interpretation

MODERATE CHARGES



V
T
T

C
pl
kn
at
m
w
T
th
pr
m
F
eg
th
w
re
as
th

"
as
ter
ni
wh
to
Th
by
No
ga
re
ch
his
ex
sh

of
wo
lov

DRAMA

VOL. VI

APRIL MCMXXVIII

NUMBER 7

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

THE BEST NEW PLAYS

By E. A. Baughan

822.95
D745
v. 6
210.7

THE Arts Theatre introduced two plays of uncommon merit during the month. Cecil Lewis's translation of Paul Raynel's play with the English title of "The Unknown Warrior" held the Sunday evening audience spellbound. It is, perhaps, the most penetrating analysis of what men felt who had gone through the horrors of war. There is truth, too, in the Betrothed's idea that she must give both herself and a pretence of love to the man to whom they mean so much. I did not feel that the Father's sudden annoyance with his son's egotism was sufficiently well prepared, but that attitude of the middle-aged to the men who fought is true enough. The piece was remarkably well acted by Maurice Browne as the soldier and by Rosalinde Fuller as the Betrothed.

The other Sunday play, John van Druten's "Young Woodley," caused intense surprise as to the reasons why it had been persistently banned by the censor. The banning was not a question of certain lines which, I believe, Basil Dean was willing to omit. It was banned on general grounds. The censor, after seeing it as first performed by the Stage Society and 300 Club at the New Theatre on Sunday night, February 13, gave it his blessing. The delicacy and restraint of the performance made him change his opinion. But he did not remove his ban until the whole Press, without any exception, had expressed surprise that it should have been refused a licence.

It is a very beautiful and poignant play of the love of an adolescent boy for a woman rather older than himself. That love is not at any point sensual. Romantic

and poetic of nature she has been mentally and emotionally starved by her life with her narrow-minded, and materialistic husband. The boy expresses all the idealistic passion natural to youth when not spoiled by evil thoughts. No treatment of the subject could have been more delicate or more reticent.

That love is the real material of the play and not the half-implied attack on "the public school spirit." Frank Lawton gave a wonderful performance as Young Woodley. Possibly he does not quite look the part. He certainly is not one's ideal of a young poet. But he acted with such nervous intensity and with such appealing naturalness that he aroused more enthusiasm at the Savoy Theatre, when the play was given its first public performance on March 5, than I have ever heard in a theatre.

The wife, Kathleen O' Regan, who played the part for the 300 Club, had a certain reticence and naturalness. Frances Doble, who took her place at the Savoy, was quite uninspired.

There is really very little to say of E. A. de Marney Baruch's "Judith of Israel." The writing is stilted and the situations are theatrical. The attempt to create tragedy by making Judith fall in love with Arropherneo (as Holofernes is called in this play) and yet kill him for the sake of her persecuted race has not succeeded. It demanded much finer treatment. Sybil Thorndike handled the part with competence, but she could not do more than create a theatrical effect.

We are still obsessed by crime plays. "Blackmail" at the Globe proved a poor

THE BEST NEW PLAYS

affair, but Reginald Berkeley's "The Listeners" is effective in its way. "The Spider" and "The Trial of Mary Dugan" at the Queen's seek to create illusion by the simple process of destroying it. In the first of these two plays the audience is seeing a variety show when a shot is fired from the audience. The theatre is then invaded by a police inspector and his officers, and even the exits were guarded during the intervals. The end was anything but thrilling, and the change of scene from the stage to the manager's room and a dressing-room marred the illusion.

"The Trial of Mary Dugan" is much more logical. The stage is set as an American court of law and the curtain never descends. The audience is supposed to be the jury. But it is very doubtful if all this childish realism of environment helped the illusion. It would make quite as much effect if given merely as a play.

It is a good piece of melodramatic workmanship and is remarkably well acted by an American cast.

"A Man with Red Hair," at the Little Theatre, shocked many people who had read Hugh Walpole's fascinating novel. The tendency of the play is certainly Sadistic, but I cannot honestly say that it unnerved me. Charles Laughton's acting was so fine as a display of virtuosity that I am afraid I could not take the play seriously. That might be considered an adverse criticism of this very talented young actor, but that he made me forget the horror of the play is due to my critical reactions to his skill as actor.

I did not see A. A. Milne's "The Fourth Wall," but I have heard good accounts of it. All agree, however, that the scene in which the two young people try to discover the victim by their powers of deduction and analysis, is too long.

HOMAGE TO IBSEN

The Centenary of Ibsen's birth, which occurred on Tuesday, March 20, was celebrated variously in London, by stage performances, banquets and lectures. The Drama League's contribution was a series of five lectures at the Royal Society of Arts on consecutive Monday afternoons concluding on the eve of the birthday. The lecturers were Sir Edmund Gosse (Chairman, the Norwegian Minister); Prof. J. G. Robertson (Chairman, Dr. F. S. Boas); Mr. Desmond MacCarthy (Chairman, Col. Archer, whose place was taken by Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth); Miss Elizabeth Robins (Chairman, Mr. J. T. Grein), and Mr. George Bernard Shaw, (Chairman, Dame Madge Kendal). We append reports, all too brief, of the lectures.

SIR EDMUND GOSSE:

IBSEN THE MAN

Sir Edmund Gosse said that the year 1828 saw the birth of three men of letters whose genius was extraordinary and whose influence was far-reaching. They pursued their long careers without once coming into sympathetic contact. George Meredith, Leo Tolstoy and Henrik Ibsen might have flourished in different planets for any interest which they took in one another. He once, for the amusement of the thing, asked Ibsen what he thought of Tolstoy. The great Norwegian puckered up his features,

and answered with a snap, "He is mad" (*han er gal*): nothing else. When he was spoken to, with the same malicious purpose, about Meredith, Ibsen had never heard the name of the author of "The Egoist." There could be no more curious instance of the divergence of literary taste than the blank indifference of these three great men to the achievement of the others, and it is an example of the distinction between the creative and the critical attitude in literature. It would be inexcusable for any responsible critic to refuse attention to Ibsen, Tolstoy, and Meredith alike, but it was perfectly natural and even picturesque, that the three chief creative spirits of 1828 should live and die in blank ignorance of one another.

The lecturer said that he took what he hoped was a pardonable pride in having been the first person to print the name of Henrik Ibsen in an English publication. This was in 1872, and what he wrote then, with, he must confess, very incomplete knowledge, had the good fortune to meet the eyes of the late William Archer, who, then a schoolboy, was induced by it to begin that study of the writings of Ibsen

HOMAGE TO IBSEN

PROF. J. G. ROBERTSON:

IBSEN'S PLACE IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

which led to his masterly translation of the works, and to his propaganda in their favour. In celebrating the centenary of Ibsen it must not be forgotten that Archer was the real founder of the fame of that writer in England.

Sir Edmund added that in process of time he himself gained an exacter knowledge, and that he was indulged to the end by the friendship of the poet. Ibsen had the reputation of being morose and of very difficult access, but he never ceased to display to him an affectionate and charming kindness. Ibsen was, indeed, a Polar bear, but his hug could be neither cold nor dangerous when he chose to be complaisant.

He said that in the present course of lectures various aspects of Ibsen's genius would be exposed by lecturers of special authority in their various fields. He desired to bring Ibsen before them as he remembered him, the short stocky figure in a long frock-coat, hurrying automatically along the pavement of Oslo, or sitting in his study, his little brilliant eyes fixed on the visitor through his spectacles, his broad and formidable head surrounded by a halo of wild white hair and voluminous mutton-chop whisker. It was as such a portent of violent individualism as our conventional and democratic age rarely produced that he wished to present Ibsen to the audience.

Sir Edmund then proceeded to give an outline of the earlier years of the poet's career, mainly in illustration of the growth of his theatrical experience and of his appeal to his own, and then to a European, public. In particular, attention was called to the curious way in which, as his circle of influence became wider, he divested himself of that delicacy of metrical form which could only be appreciated by Norwegian readers, and adopted a colloquial prose, which could be transferred without loss into any language. In conclusion, the lecturer urged his audience not to be betrayed into thinking that Ibsen had a "gospel" to deliver or had a didactic purpose in his satires, but to read his plays for the entertainment to be found in them, and not in the least as though their original, eccentric, and powerful writer had any ambition to be taken as a pioneer in politics or morals.

The lecturer dealt with the position of Ibsen in the movement of nineteenth-century ideas. Ibsen's début was made under the influence of the Revolution of 1848, and his first works represented an effort to combat the Romantic interpretation of history in the drama. With the works of his middle period, "Brand," "Peer Gynt" and "Emperor and Galilean," he came forward as the poet of individualism and personality, as a fighter against the collectivism of the Hegelian philosophy. Here he is the successor of Hebbel in the European drama. In his first fight Ibsen is worsted and falls back on fatalism. But he returned to the problem of personality in the great social dramas of the 'seventies and 'eighties, from the "Pillars of Society" to "An Enemy of the People," which brought him world fame. From "The Wild Duck" onwards, the old doubts began to assail him again. He ceases to write dramas with a purpose; his work becomes more intimately personal. But never, in spite of the increasingly sombre outlook of his later years, does he lose his faith in the coming of the "third kingdom." We think of Ibsen as a realist; and he gave European realism in dramas like "The Wild Duck" and "Rosmersholm," masterpieces of realistic art; but at heart he was a fighter for the old essentially Romantic faith in personality, and that individualism which forms a steadily growing force in the literature of his century.

MR. DESMOND MACCARTHY:

IBSEN THE DRAMATIST

"I suggest," said Mr. MacCarthy, "that we should think of modern drama as an instrument not unlike an organ with three keyboards. The top keyboard, so to speak, is the story; that is to say, the sequence of incident and interplay of character and emotion, which must be convincing. Nearly

HOMAGE TO IBSEN

all playwrights who get a hearing and draw large audiences, are more or less expert in playing on the first manual; Mr. Noel Coward, for instance, to mention one of our contemporaries. The second keyboard is that of Ideas. It is Bernard Shaw's brilliant execution on the second keyboard, with just enough plausibility in his touch upon the first which makes him so much the most stimulating of contemporary playwrights. Then there is a third keyboard, one which Shaw has used more seldom, though in "Heart Break House" and "Major Barbara" he has done so. How am I to suggest what I want this image to symbolize?"

Mr. MacCarthy went on to indicate that this third manual had to do with æsthetic emotion, with the sense of sharing a contemplative attitude towards the whole of life, the exaltation which works of intellectual beauty inspire. Ibsen was the only modern dramatist who had played like a master on the three manuals of the great dramatic organ. Ibsen had been the great stimulator and disturber of men's thoughts. He was also a great story-teller. And he had a deep sense of beauty. Ibsen was the militant poet of one side of man's nature, a one-sided poet if you like, but the greatest spokesman of that side. His plays might be a bag of dynamite into which any social reformer could dip, but it was not the fall of this or that institution or law that interested Ibsen. His scepticism regarding political reforms was profound. To read the words "a committee has been appointed," it is said, was one of the few things that made Ibsen laugh.

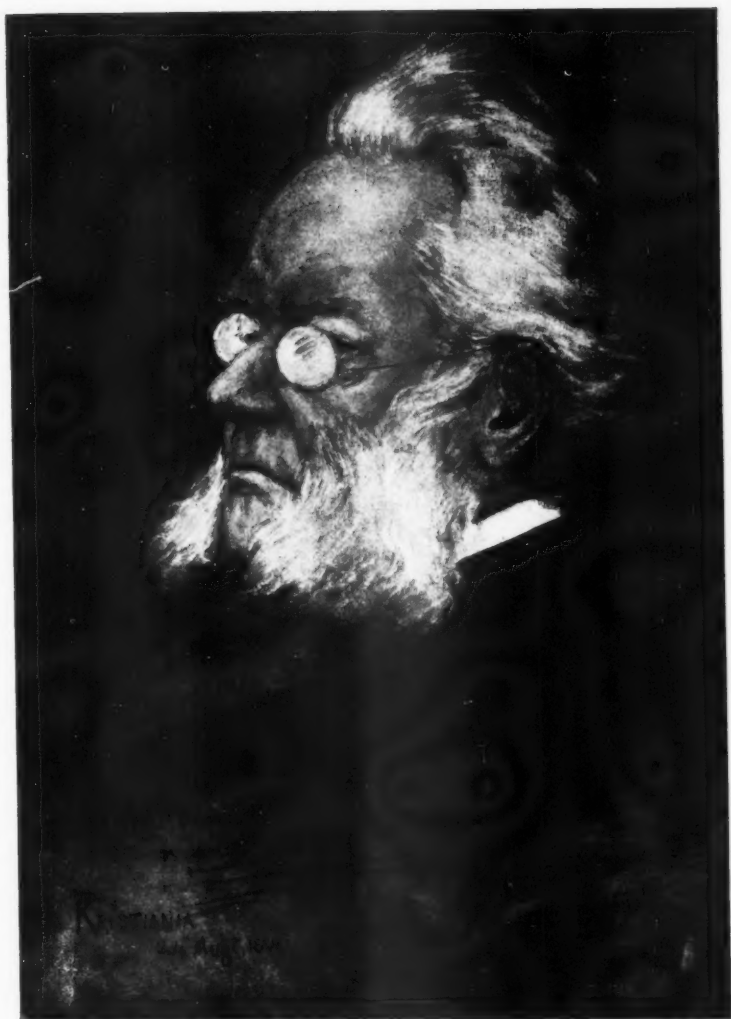
Mr. MacCarthy analysed several of the plays by the standard laid down, and concluded by remarking on the inability of many modern persons to perceive the true strength of Ibsen, because as individuals they handle the stuff of tragedy in their own lives differently. "All we who believe in Ibsen can do is first to remove the mistaken notion that he was primarily one who dealt with social problems, and then to stress the fact that, apart from being a master player on the full dramatic organ, he was essentially a great tragic dramatist."

MISS ELIZABETH ROBINS:

IBSEN AND THE ACTRESS

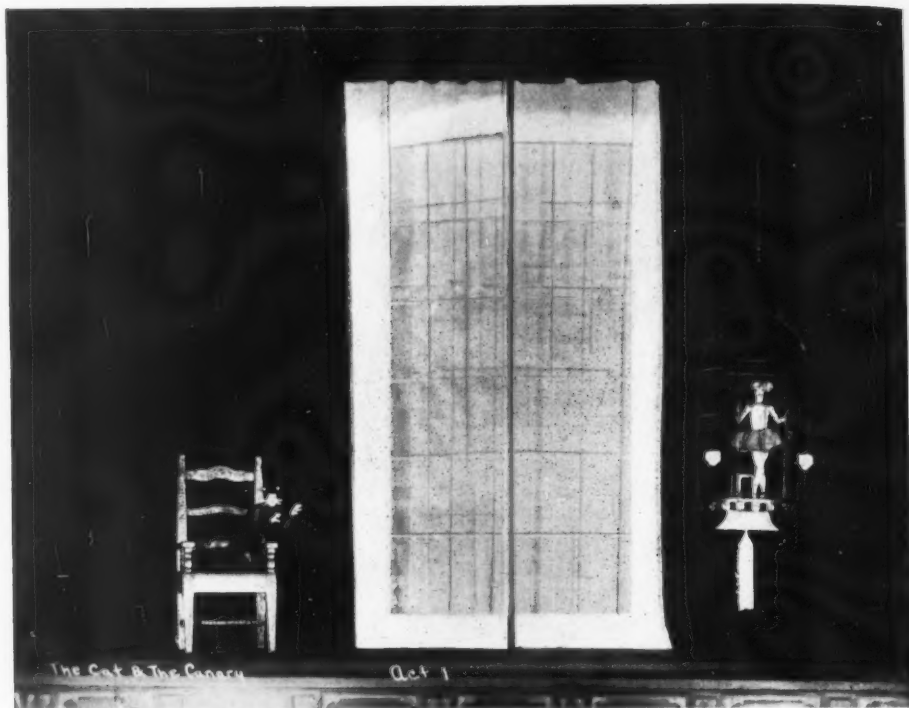
Miss Robins, in referring to the previous lectures, said that Ibsen had been dealt with as a man, as an influence in European literature, and as a dramatist, but to "place" Ibsen as any of these we must remind ourselves afresh of the chasm that might exist between the literature of the drama and the literature of the stage. The readiest instances in the English language were, of course, Tennyson and Browning, and there was the whole company of poets before and after those two, who created in dramatic form a literature that never became stage literature. Unlike Ibsen, the authors of these poetic dramas made their reputations without help from the stage, and, if they lived at all, they lived on the printed page. But Ibsen's poetry, apart from what went into his acted plays, would not have carried his name outside Scandinavia. Without the help of the stage the world would not have had an Ibsen to celebrate—and without Ibsen the world would not have had the stage as it became after his plays were acted.

More than anybody who ever wrote for the stage, Ibsen could and usually did collaborate with his actors. She did not mean that he ever consulted one of them. The collaboration was a subtler thing than that. Ibsen was by training so intensely a man of the theatre that—to an extent she knew in no other dramatist—he understood where he could leave some of his greatest effects to be made by the actor, and so left them. All that he seemed to require of the actor was that he should not be too conceited, or too hopelessly divorced from naturalness, to be fit to collaborate with such a playwright, a poet who, with all his consummate craft, had taken Nature for his master-mistress. By the power of his truth and the magic of his poetry Ibsen did something to their imagination that not only gave the actors an impetus, but an impetus in a right direction. Whatever direction the individual gift and temper of the actor inclined to, the effects that Ibsen left him to make were Ibsen's effects.



HENRIK IBSEN IN 1891. FROM THE DRAWING BY
GEORGE R. HALKETT.

This drawing belonged to William Archer, and has
now been presented to the British Drama League
Library by Mrs. George R. Halkett.



THE FIRST ACT OF "THE CAT AND THE CANARY," PRODUCED RECENTLY IN NEW YORK

HOMAGE TO IBSEN

MR. BERNARD SHAW:

IBSEN—AND AFTER

Mr. Shaw claimed for Ibsen that he was among the first of story-tellers. He told the kind of stories which in the words of a friend of his, "made the bottom fall out of the universe." Ibsen was one of those who changed the world's mind, destroyed "respectability" as it had been known, and challenged conduct in various directions. There was only one other man who had the same vital effect as Ibsen during the nineteenth century, and he was not a story-teller. He was Karl Marx.

Comparing Ibsen and Shakespeare, Mr. Shaw said Ibsen "recapitulated" Shakespeare, got done with him, and wrapped him into a small parcel before he was thirty. He had passed the stage of Molière before he was forty, and of Goethe before he was fifty. And then Ibsen, having passed through all these, began his greatest efforts in realism, taking at first the obvious things that he saw to be wrong in society, exposing them, and getting deeper and deeper into realism as he went on.

"I say without hesitation that Shakespeare and Molière were always like beginners compared with Ibsen in the valuation of the human mind, in the faculty of insight, and in the fundamental genius of the story-teller."

Contrasting the pre-Ibsen woman and the post-Ibsen woman, Mr. Shaw said that Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë were not real women. "They were stage women. They were women who discovered that there was an ideal woman, as it were, and that it was up to them to play the part. The woman of those days had to cover the lower part of her person with a very long skirt, and as for the upper part of her person, it had to be, not dressed, but upholstered. She had to be what is known as the Victorian woman, and to be dressed so as to excite 'sex appeal.'"

"I have my dreams of the past, and when I think of the women I loved, it is nothing like the present-day young person with legs that I see, but a woman with a long skirt and an ample bodice. But, you know, the real animal was there all the time.

"It was Ibsen who broke the spell. He smashed the stage woman, with the result that the next generation of women came up as real. They came up as almost exactly like men. The Victorian woman was a humbug—a wonderful person indeed, but a sham—one acting a part. And when Ibsen came along she went to her dressing-room and took off her make-up."

Mr. Shaw said that in his own plays his success with women characters was because he had assumed that women was almost exactly like man—as indeed they were!

Finally Mr. Shaw had some interesting things to say about Ibsen and the theatre. Before Ibsen came the theatre had actors but no ideas. The result of this was that acting, however fine, became detached from the art of interpreting life and became the art of exploiting and exhibiting character. There was consequently nothing in the plays of the time except what the actor put into them. As the theatre became more and more starved of ideas actors like Irving became unable to do anything but exploit their own personality. The play became nothing and the actor everything.

Ibsen suddenly hurled a world full of ideas into the theatre, or rather Ibsen used the old familiar ideas of morality, but brought about a complete transvaluation of them. Quoting the classical definition of comedy as "castigating morals by ridicule," Mr. Shaw said that Ibsen did not ridicule people because they did not conform to the old ideas of morality—he derided those ideas themselves.

"I like to have a good curtain," Mr. Shaw said.

The curtain to this lecture was to this effect: "In Shakespeare's time actors saved themselves from being 'rogues and vagabonds' by becoming the 'servants' of the king or great lords. Now they have the work before them which Ibsen did, that of interpreting life; and this duty, common to the poet and the actor, raises the actor not only from the gutter but from being the king's servant to being the servant of God."

Dame Madge Kendal was in the chair, and received, incidentally, a courtly compliment from Mr. Shaw on the acting of Madge Robertson.

THE JEWISH THEATRE

By John Sorsky

I WONDER how many English playgoers are acquainted with the fact that there exists a "Jewish Theatre."

Comparatively few, I feel sure.

Yet this is a great pity, because the "Jewish Theatre" can boast of a galaxy of great artists, as well as of an abundance of real dramatic art.

It is this same theatre which has produced such great actors as Maurice Schwartz (who created a stir in London), Madame Lobel (whose tragic performance of "Madame X" startled the English public many years ago), the late David Kessler (the great Jewish-American Tragedian), and last (but not least) Maurice Moscovitch, who needs no introduction to the modern English public. These are only a few of the many Jewish stars worthy of mention.

Then again the "Jewish Theatre" can claim many distinguished dramatists, whose works are perhaps not well known to the English public, but who, nevertheless, stand out as veritable giants in the field of Jewish dramatic art. Among these, perhaps, the greatest and the most prominent is the late Jacob Gordon, whose "God, Man and the Devil," "The Unknown," "The True Power," and "Elisha Ben Avia" are masterpieces of the Jewish stage. Then there are Sholem Ash and Peretz Hirschbein, two notable personalities in the Jewish theatrical world, and I have always regretted that the works of these writers are not known to play-goers of other nationalities, besides those who are intimately connected with the Jewish stage. For the "theatre" is not only a building wherein people gather as to a place of mere amusement, "Theatre" (to me) stands out as something which is universal—a mirror which reflects every phase of life—and as such should be looked upon as essentially international.

To the student, the "Jewish Theatre" should prove especially interesting. When one studies the various "theatres" of different nationalities one is at once struck by the crudities and the contrasts, when

compared with the theatre with which one is familiar. For example, when witnessing the performance of a Chinese play one is at once astounded by the great gap which is left to the fantastic imagination of the spectators. In many cases, when it is desired that the audience should be acquainted with the fact that a particular scene takes place outside the wall of a castle, three coolies lay themselves on top of one another to emphasize this intention; and although this appears very absurd to the European playgoer, it is nevertheless a very interesting study, for it portrays the Chinese imaginative mind, as well as the conventional character. The same (although in a different sense) applies to the "Jewish Theatre," for it reflects Jewish life truly and faithfully, in all its phases.

A diagnosis will prove that a play is dependent and based upon four great principles, which serve in the same way and for the same purpose as four girders of a building. These four important factors are dialogue, action, rhythm and colour, one of which is useless without the remaining three, and vice versa. Whoever heard of a good play without the above qualities? What is the true artistic play if not a finished picture or result of the combination of these four essentials?

And all these are to be found in the works of the Jewish dramatists. If you seek action, it is there. Dialogue?—why, most certainly, words which go right to the very heart and grip. Colour?—well, in an unusual way perhaps, but perfectly appropriate. Rhythm?—emphatically yes; rhythm plays a great game in the "Jewish Theatre," as well as in Jewish life generally.

But let me be more explicit and explain by a practical example.

I recently attended a performance at the Pavilion Theatre, in the Mile End Road, where Irving himself once played, and which still retains its old prompter's box. This theatre is the home of Jewish drama, and at present the only one in England

THE JEWISH THEATRE

entirely concerned with Jewish Dramatic Art. It was here that I saw Joseph Kessler and his company, and what surprised me was the fact that this troupe of players perform a different play every evening, a feat which proves the assiduousness of these artists, as well as the pride which they take in their work.

The play on this particular evening happened to be Jacob Gordon's "The True Power," and apart from Mr. Kessler's fine conception and interpretation of the leading rôle, and the fine support of the entire company, the play itself offered a typical specimen of Gordon's abundant knowledge of the stage, as well as his philosophical insight of Jewish life. I would indeed lay stress upon the fact that this type of play is of vital importance to the student of the art of the Theatre. Here you have as good a specimen as you could desire of the real Jewish drama, by an individual who really understood the Jewish life in all its phases. Here also the student could decipher the different types of characters, the mode of living of the Jew, the style of dress of the period, the tragedies of Jewish life, as well as the Jewish temperament. In short, this little gem, which is in the repertoire of every recognized Jewish theatrical company, is a play which no student of Jewish Drama can afford to miss.

And not only are Jewish works produced in the "Jewish Theatre" but here one may also see the plays of English, French, German and American dramatists. Admittedly it specializes in its own writers (which is only natural, considering every point of view) but nevertheless it is cosmopolitan and impartial to creed or nationality. For example, Maurice Moscovitch produced Strindberg's "The Father" (in Yiddish) before it was recently played in London with Robert Loraine in the leading part; Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and "Romeo and Juliet" enjoy great popularity among Jewish play-goers, and are highly esteemed, which all goes to prove the general standard and high principle of the "Jewish Theatre."

But if only to obtain an aspect of a "Theatre" which is practically unknown to the theatrical world—if only to watch the actions which are truly portrayed—if only to see the enthusiasm of an audience

which lives every moment of the play—this "Theatre" should be worthy of consideration. "Theatre" is life: life is "Theatre."

AN ALTERNATIVE END

"A DOLL'S HOUSE"

At the concluding lecture in the Drama League Ibsen Centenary Series the League showed a small but interesting collection of Ibsen exhibits from the Library of the Royal Society of Arts. Among these exhibits was a cutting from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, of April 20, 1900, kindly lent by Madame Jastrow. It includes a letter from Ibsen, of date, February 18, 1880, to the Director, Heinrich Taube of Vienna, deprecating the suggestion that "Nora" ("A Doll's House") would come more artistically under the category "Comedy" if it had a happy ending.

Ibsen roundly asserts that "categories" should be deduced from actual works of art, not vice versa, and maintains that such an ending must weaken the play. At the same time he sends a copy of an alternative finale he had actually made for an actress of Hamburg, who *knew* that North Germany would not stand Nora's desertion of her home. This conclusion runs:—

NORA: For us two to live together would not make a marriage. Good-bye. (*Going.*)

HELMER: Very well—go. (*Seizes her arm.*) But first you shall see your children for the last time.

NORA: Let me go. I won't see them again. I can't.

HELMER (*drawing her towards the door on the left*): You shall see them. (*He opens the door and adds softly*): Look! There they sleep, so care free and calm. To-morrow, when they wake and call for mother, they will be motherless.

NORA (*swaying*): Motherless!

HELMER: Even as you were.

NORA: Motherless! (*After an inward fight, she drops her travelling bag.*) Oh, I am sinning against myself, but I cannot leave them. (*She half falls against the door.*)

HELMER (*delighted, but softly*): Nora!
(The curtain falls.)

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

President:

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN.

Chairman of the Council:

H. GRANVILLE-BARKER.

Hon. Secretary: GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

Hon. Treasurer: ALEC REA.

MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All Enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary, at the Offices of the League, 8 Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C.2.

Telephone: GERRARD 8011.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

EVENTS of the last few weeks have provided an interesting commentary on the system of theatrical censorship which obtains in this country. The first performance of "Young Woodley," by the 300 Club and the Incorporated Stage Society, was unlicensed by the Lord Chamberlain. But when, as mentioned on another page, he had himself viewed the performance, the Lord Chamberlain found himself enabled to reverse his decision. Another play, produced last month, which in the reading, no doubt, seemed quite innocuous, offended, on the stage, more than one eminent critic. The censorship, while it functions on the basis of the written rather than the acted play, is indeed a rough and ready business. Yet almost all of us admit that there are limits, political or otherwise, which it is wise to maintain. Witness the curious absence of public protest at the refusal of a licence to the Nurse Cavel film "Dawn."

The two weeks following Easter will be a busy period for the Drama League so far as London is concerned. On Sunday evening, April 15, a public dinner is being organized by the League, as a tribute to Miss Sybil Thorndike and to Mr. Lewis Casson, on the eve of their departure for an extensive tour in South Africa. Lord Gorell will preside, and there is a distinguished toast list. Then on Wednesday afternoon and evening, April 11, at the Arts Theatre Club, the children of the Hall School, Weybridge, will give two demonstrations of their most recent school play, "The Lay of Sir Orpheo and Dame Erodys," an event which should be of the greatest interest to all who desire to witness school drama in its most developed form. Sir Michael Sadler will speak at the afternoon performance, and any profits arising from the production will be very kindly given by Miss Gilpin to the funds of the Drama League Library.

The Easter school for amateur producers will occupy the fortnight beginning Tuesday, April 10. The school is advertised elsewhere in this number. It only remains to state that a few vacancies remain, and that applications from intending students should at once be made to the Hon. Secretary, at 8 Adelphi Terrace. Full particulars of the events mentioned in the preceding paragraph will also be sent post free to any applicant.

The Council of the League has appointed Miss Dorothy Coates to succeed Miss Violet Clayton as librarian. Miss Coates is fully qualified for the work, and comes with a lengthy experience in the library of Sir Leicester Harmsworth at Bexhill. She will take up her duties immediately after Easter.

Miss Mary Kelly has been co-opted on to the Council of the League, as representing the Village Drama Society, with which body the League is now officially associated.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"To-Morrow." By C. B. Fernald. "The Dark Angel." By H. B. Trevelyan. "The True Likeness." By Mary Pakington. "Dad." By Harold Holland. Benn. 3s. 6d. each.
 "The Way of an Angel." By James R. Gregson. Schofield and Sims. 3s. 6d.
 "Warren Hastings." By Howard Peacey. Cayme Press. 3s. 6d.
 "The Judgment of Dr. Johnson." By G. K. Chesterton. Sheed and Ward. 3s. 6d.
 "Machines." By Reginald Berkeley. Holden. 5s.

THERE is an absurd superstition that every theatrical manager has a cupboardful of masterpieces which he is either too lazy to read or too stupid to produce; but anybody who has had anything to do with the plays submitted to a theatre knows how seldom a play arrives which it is even worth while reading to the end, and the latest plays added to Messrs. Benn's series of Contemporary British Dramatists are another reminder of how hard it is to find passable plays. Of these four plays the best is Mr. Fernald's, but I have no desire to see it in a theatre until it has been whittled down to a Grand Guignol thriller in one act.

"The Dark Angel" is another play with two acts too many. There is one finely-handled scene in which a war-blinded man conceals his blindness from the woman he was to have married while he releases her from her promise. It is a scene full of gaping pitfalls—sentimentality on the one hand, easy cynicism and brutality on the other—but the author emerges safely from the ordeal without ever having given us even the smallest twinge of alarm. The two earlier acts are uninteresting.

"The True Likeness" is "a fantasy of the middle ages," oppressively picturesque and smothered in local colour laid on with a thick brush. But it has considerable theatrical effectiveness and as a collection of scenes for a pageant it would be admirable. Judged as a play it is lacking in character and too superficial.

"Dad" realized all the worst fears aroused by the title. To say that it is a play that oozes sentimentality altogether fails to convey the peculiarly aggressive sentimentality of the piece. By the time I had finished reading it I felt as if I had been squirted with treacle from a garden hose.

It was a relief to turn to Mr. Gregson's book of one-act plays, in which the sentiment is of the sort which has its roots among hard facts and is sharply flavoured with humour. The best play in the book seems to me to be "Liddy." In this play the sentiment is apparently so easily kept from thickening into sentimentality that one is apt to forget what a sticky cloying mess the theme would have become in less certain hands. Probably most people will prefer the efficient, amusing little play which gives the title to the book. Admittedly it is as well done as this sort of thing can be done, but it is the kind of play of which I am desperately weary. "Youth Disposes" is a comparative

failure, chiefly owing to the author flatly stating and explaining his theme through the mouths of his characters, instead of expressing it dramatically. The same fault to some extent mars the remaining play in the book, "Melchisidek," in which the characters seem there to illustrate a theme rather than to express it dramatically.

Mr. Peacey's "Warren Hastings" is far below the level of the author's best work. Mr. Chesterton is another author who this time fails to do himself justice. "Competent," that damning word of faint praise, was the last word with which I ever expected to dismiss anything written by Mr. Chesterton, but it is the obvious word for his neat, sincere, and rather tepid play about Dr. Johnson.

"Machines," according to the announcement which bellows from the wrapper, is "The Play Banned by the B.B.C.," and several pages are devoted to the correspondence on the matter between the B.B.C. and the author. If the play were a little better it might be possible to summon up some interest in the controversy, but "Machines" is so rambling and melodramatic that one can hardly be expected to feel very indignant over the circumstances which deprive one of the opportunity of hearing it. Nevertheless, the publication of the play is interesting, as one so seldom gets the chance of studying in print a play specially written for the microphone, and this time the interest is enormously enhanced by Mr. Berkeley's preface on the writing of wireless plays, in which he states his belief that broadcasting is about to lead to a revival of poetic drama.

"Parties of the Play." By Ivor Brown. Benn. 8s. 6d.

It is immensely encouraging to find a dramatic critic setting out to discuss the share of author, producer, actor, and designer in creating a play on the stage. There are still an absurdly large number of dramatic critics who regard producers and designers as either the hereditary foes or the insignificant drudges of the author, and make no attempt to understand or criticize their work. As Mr. Ivor Brown points out, there are newspapers which print above their notice of the play a full list of the cast, including the butler whose only line is "Yes, your Grace," and leave out the producer. This book is a magnificently sane and balanced discussion of the whole position of the producer in the theatre, and in the end it reaches the conclusion that although the different parties in the play are never likely to work in complete harmony within a single theatre, there is no reason why Actor's Theatre, Producer's Theatre, and Author's Theatre should not maintain a neighbourly relationship within the confines of a single street. I recommend this book most strongly to every intelligent playgoer, and although it is not a book which has anything very new to tell the worker in the theatre, it states the whole case so fairly that it should put an end to a great deal of rather profitless argument in the theatre itself.

SOME NOTES ON PLAY-CHOOSING

By C. B. Purdom

(Concluded from March number of "Drama")

SO while I now admit that no plays need be regarded as outside the scope of amateur players, I qualify that by saying that the capabilities of the players govern what they should attempt to do. A play that can be done by one company cannot be done by another. Any play chosen should be appropriate to the players, the audience, and the facilities available. Village players should not attempt Oscar Wilde, for they cannot represent artificial comedy of manners. Chesterton's "Magic" would not be intelligible to an unsophisticated audience. "Milestones" should not be attempted unless the proper costumes and settings can be got. And so on.

I place the different classes of plays in the following order of difficulty :—

Comedy, the hardest.

Tragedy, almost as difficult.

Romantic plays, much easier.

Farce easier still and

Naturalistic plays easiest of all.

Most light comedies, with light, witty, epigrammatic dialogue, are the most difficult of all plays for amateurs to attempt to do. Comedy needs personality and knowledge of the stage. It looks easy; it has to look easy; but it requires that the actor should have complete command of himself and his resources as an artist. It shows up all faults; and crudeness, slovenliness and incompetence are set in a glaring light. The plays of A. A. Milne and Noel Coward are in this category; and personally I would rather pay anything than see one of them done by amateurs, for without a miracle they would be certain to be bad.

It is important to remember that in all comedy, personality is important. Even in Shakespearean comedy, where the characters are fully expressed in the words of the plays, personality counts for much. And Shaw, which many amateurs consider to be easy, needs personality for really good results. His dialogue, which is about the most perfect stage dialogue ever written, almost speaks itself, and players sometimes think they have been successful in a

Shaw play when it has amused the audience, when what has really happened is that the audience has got pleasure out of the dialogue in spite of the actor. I suggest there is no exception to the rule that all comedy depends on personality.

Tragedy requires sure touch in the players and ability to create atmosphere, the action must be sustained without the slightest faltering right up to the climax. The plays themselves usually have more substance than is possessed by comedies, and this makes them easier, for the words can bear more; but unless the most careful production can be given and the players depended upon, tragedy should not be chosen. Most tragedy needs a good deal of physical power in voice and physique and players who have this are necessary.

Romantic plays are among the best plays for amateurs, and it is a pity there are so few of them. "The Fantasticks," by Edmond Rostand, though somewhat slight, is a good example. They need to be played with spirit and without realism. Fantastic, symbolic and religious plays may be placed in the same class. Technical deficiencies are not so noticeable in these plays, and usually a tolerable effect can be secured with a minimum of means. They are remote from real life and audiences will accept whatever is kept within the convention in which they are presented.

Farce is easy, because it depends entirely upon construction and situation. This also is remote from real life. It needs brisk, sharp, clear playing and smart production.

The easiest plays of all, and those most commonly done by amateurs, especially those companies that try to do the better plays, are naturalistic, dealing with ordinary people in common life. These plays may be comedies or tragedies, more often the latter. They are frequently in dialect. They represent people familiar or nearly familiar to the players. Harold Brighouse, Gilbert Cannon, Harold Chapin, Gertrude Jennings, St. John Ervine, John Galsworthy, Stanley Houghton, Charles McEvoy, Eugene

SOME NOTES ON PLAY-CHOOSING

O'Neill are among the writers of this class of play. They are usually simple to stage and to cast. They are so simple that it is frequently forgotten that any technique whatever is necessary to do them. Yet they can be badly done and I am afraid usually are. There is, however, far less excuse for indifferent work in them than in other plays.

I think it is right that amateurs should do these plays. They are handling what they know and can bring all their knowledge to bear upon their work. Often amateurs can stage plays of this sort better than professionals, because they are nearer the source. There is an abundance of character parts in them, which are the easiest parts to play.

In choosing plays, avoid what is hackneyed. Do not look up the programmes of other amateur companies and follow their lead. If a play is being revived on the professional stage avoid it for the time being. Aim at doing fresh and original work. For that reason get hold of original plays when you can. Amateur companies ought to spend much more time in searching for original plays than they do. An original play, even if not quite so good as a well-known play that you could do should be chosen in preference to it. By doing original works amateurs can contribute something original to the theatre in playing, staging, and in the plays themselves.

There is this that has to be said, however, in this connexion. If it is important to do a good well-known play as well as you can, it is of much greater importance to do a new play well. Some companies seem to think that they need not take too much trouble over an original play. But that is unfair to the playwright. An original work may be damned by being murdered by amateurs. I know playwrights who would never dream of allowing the first production of their plays to be in the hands of amateurs; and I feel they are right. When original plays are given to you to do, the most conscientious work should be devoted to them by all concerned. It should be regarded as an honour to have the opportunity of presenting plays for the first time, and the work should be done with scrupulous care.

In choosing a programme, it should be remembered that one-act plays are easier to do than full-length plays. Three or four one-act plays require much less effort than one three- or four-act play. When putting on a series of one-act plays, study the make-up of the programme carefully and get variety and contrast. Do not put on two plays by the same author, though it is possible to devote the whole programme to the work of one author and be successful with it. Study the order in which the plays are to be given and put the most cheerful one at the end. It is worth noting, however, that a programme of short plays is rarely as successful as a full-length play.

Comprehensive, up-to-date lists of plays, giving a brief description of the plot, would be of great value and I hope the League will issue a supplement to its Players Guide of plays not in its Library, that should be known to those who have the duty of choosing plays for performance.

In conclusion, let me summarize what I have attempted to put before you. In choosing plays consider the object you have in view, the delight of the audience. Choose a play that you like, that the players will like, that the audience will enjoy. Choose a play that is within the capabilities of your players, that you can cast, that you have the facilities to produce. Do not be afraid to break fresh ground. Choose original plays when you can do them well. Do not decide upon the first play that comes into your head or that is suggested to you. Remember that choosing a play is a difficult business and that a well-chosen play is half way to success. When you have made your choice, spare no effort to do justice to the work you have chosen.

MODERN MYSTERY PLAY IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

On Whit Monday and Tuesday a new Nativity Play by John Masefield will be presented in the Nave of Canterbury Cathedral. Music has been specially written by Joseph Holst, and the dresses will be made from designs by Charles Ricketts.

AN AMERICAN SCHOOL OF DRAMA

By Martin E. Browne

ALTHOUGH plays, actors and directors so constantly cross the Atlantic, theatre-lovers on either side have little opportunity to learn anything of the methods of training in dramatic art upon the other. It may, therefore, interest readers of DRAMA to see into an American theatrical school, on the staff of which the writer is working.

The Carnegie Institute of Technology at Pittsburgh is young even for an American college, being one of the innumerable results of Andrew Carnegie's liberality. Nevertheless, it was the first American college to institute a course in Drama leading to a B.A. degree; and its main object in doing so—that of producing educated actors—is still unique. Other and more famous schools have adopted the Drama into a University curriculum, but not from the actor's point of view.

The course is a four-year one, which it is possible for exceptionally good students to complete in three years. On the academic side it includes English and one or more modern languages, Dramatic Literature and History of the Theatre, a general History course and an Introductory Psychology course. A very important addition to the class work is the physical training: Diction (the necessity of which to the American actor with his polyglot ancestry is almost impossible for the English reader to conceive), Gymnastics, Folk-Dancing and Aesthetic Dancing, Fencing and Eurhythmics. These, of course, like the "academic" subjects, are spread over the whole course. They have a very powerful influence in turning our extremely raw material, mostly the seventeen-year-old products of provincial high schools, into people of enough poise and assurance to stand projection into the grim *melée* of American stage life.

But, after all, my readers will be saying all this is only an admirable background—admirable indeed, but it will not teach people to act any more than finger-exercises teach one to play. Only the theatre can teach its own art. And so, of course,

it is. The laboratory of the department is a little theatre, in which about 100 performances are given by the students every year. At first, the newcomer scarcely appears at all before the footlights; he is busy filling in his background, and doing the work of a stage-hand or a seamstress for the more advanced students. But his hours in the theatre steadily increase. If he be an actor, he will be upon the stage; if he elect the option of "production" he will be making scenery, working lights, directing one-act plays; if he be a playwright of any promise at all he will be able to watch his own work in rehearsal and performance.

By Andrew Carnegie's wish, the theatre is free of entry to its audience. And by reason of ten years of first-class work, it has a regular list of patrons who fill it almost always to capacity. The first director (Mr. Thomas Wood Stevens, now of the Goodman Theatre, Chicago) instituted, and his successor, Mr. B. Iden Payne (Miss Horniman's producer at Manchester) has followed a policy of giving only the very best. Mr. Payne is an authority on Shakespearean production, whom it is criminal that England should have lost. He has made an adaptation of the Shakespearean stage to the modern little theatre, which gives the verbal continuity in which the plays were heard by the author, and under those conditions nearly half his plays have been done at the school. Besides the annual one, and sometimes two, of Shakespeare's plays, the programme includes the widest variety of drama, from Greek tragedy to modern American "type" comedy, through the "high comedy" of Sheridan and Molière and the best of modern dramatists in all countries. In the latter case the Department depends upon the interest of playwrights in the training of actors, for as it takes no admission money it can pay no royalties.

It is difficult for one concerned in the work to give any idea of the standard attained. The writer's first experience of

AN AMERICAN SCHOOL OF DRAMA

production at the school was with Paul Claudel's mediæval drama "The Tidings Brought to Mary." One would expect to find such a play quite beyond the understanding or the performance of young students. But they acclaimed the task of fathoming M. Claudel's ideas with en-

thusiasm, and gave a performance which would compare favourably with the best little theatre work in England. Genius is rare; but talent is fairly common, and the esprit de corps which such a body as this Drama Department may build up does more than anything else can to foster it.

DRAMA IN SCOTLAND

THE registration as a limited company of the Scottish National Theatre Society marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of national drama. The Scottish National Players made their first appearance seven years ago, and were reconstituted as the Scottish National Theatre Society at the beginning of 1922, with the objects of developing national drama and encouraging in Scotland public taste for a good drama of any type. In the intervening period over fifty Scots plays have been produced, for the most part for the first time on any stage, while the Society has also enriched its repertoire by the inclusion of plays by Shaw, Drinkwater and Gordon Bottomley, Sierra, Rostand and Goldoni.

The company has appeared in the principal theatres of Edinburgh and Glasgow and visits have been paid to many Scottish towns and villages. They had the honour of appearing by command before Their Majesties at Balmoral and they have also topped the bill at the London Coliseum and were engaged thereafter to tour the English provinces.

Several names widely honoured in connexion with the national literature appear on the prospectus now issued, notably those of J. M. Barrie, Neil Munro and John Buchan, who are among the honorary vice-presidents, and Joseph Laing Waugh, who is on the board of directors. Those who have been associated with the movement in its early stages will be glad to learn that the present chairman of Council, Lieut.-Colonel Ralph Stewart, is to become chairman of the board, and that D. Glen MacKemmie, one of the founders and the

original chairman of the society, is to be the secretary of the new company.

To the Editor of DRAMA

DEAR SIR,—Your readers will be interested to know that a public effort is being made to raise funds to enable the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Players, this year's winners of the Howard de Walden Cup, to compete in the Amateur Tournament at New York early in May.

A sum of £800 is the minimum considered necessary for all expenses. The *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* has inaugurated a fund which is likely to realize £400. Our club is undertaking engagements and hopes to augment that total to £600, leaving £200 to be found by other means.

We have resolved, after careful consideration, to make a direct appeal to all the Societies competing in the last Festival. We believe they will view the matter in the fine sporting spirit which was manifest throughout the competitions and be constrained to lend a helping hand in the cause of British Drama, a service our club shall be glad to return in future years as the honours go round. We also appeal to all the non-competing Societies affiliated with the Drama League, many of whom will, it is hoped, enter the lists next year.

In name of the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Players' Club.

Yours very truly,

JAS. T. WOODBURN,
Producer,

The Players' Club,
Ardrossan and Saltcoats.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE SEAMY SIDE

DEAR SIR,—On page 93 of the March issue of DRAMA, appears a letter signed "A Village Producer." In the course of that letter the writer quotes certain confessions made by a delegate at a conference of village producers. I refer you to the last paragraph of the letter.

We are constantly being asked by village societies and women's institutes to quote special terms for their performances on the ground that they cannot afford to pay the usual fees, but if the village societies are going to applaud the sentiments expressed by the delegate referred to, the situation thus created will be a very serious one.

May I suggest that your correspondent should be asked to furnish to you the name of the society concerned, and if the society is affiliated to your League that your committee should investigate the matter and consider very seriously its disaffiliation.

Yours faithfully

G. HERBERT THRING.

Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights
and Composers,
63 Baker Street, W.

We are glad to be able to assure Mr. Thring that the individuals who made the suggestions referred to were not members of the British Drama League nor did they represent societies affiliated thereto. Such sentiments are in direct contradiction to the aims and spirit of the British Drama League, and we feel sure that they are as abhorrent to the majority of our members as they are to Mr. Thring and to ourselves. Theft is none the less theft when undertaken in the name of charity or social welfare.—Ed. DRAMA.

FEES AND PUPPETS

DEAR SIR,—As a playwright member of the Society of Authors, I have no objection to "A Village Producer" (your correspondent who replied to my article on "Village Play Production," in the February issue of DRAMA) adding to the revenues of British dramatists by paying fees and royalties to us. I do maintain, however, that, despite the growth of cinema, radio, motor-bus excursions and the other cultural advantages of modern village life advertised by your contributor, Shakespeare, Sheridan, Dekker, Jonson, Fletcher, Massinger, Congreve and other British classic dramatists, not to mention the Greek and Latin authors, still possess (when properly presented) quite as great a theatrical appeal as "A Little Bit of Fluff," "Mr. Wu," "The Green Goddess," "Outward Bound," "The Green Hat" or even "Mrs. Warren's Profession." Moreover it is almost impossible for real villagers (not, be it noted, the extra-suburbanites or semi-urban middle-class residents of villages) to give a reasonable approximation to the highly finished acting required by even the most broad social comedy or to compete with the technique of the professional players of farce. These are but a few of my reasons for advocating that village companies turn their attention to the relatively simpler and more direct "costume" pieces. And do not

modern plays demand a more expensive and more varied wardrobe than older pieces? "Dressing up" is still a valuable adjunct of drama—for all the idiotic "modern dress" phase.

I have no doubt also that "A Village Producer" will withdraw the implication that I ever suggested sharp practice in the avoidance of payment of authors' fees.

As for Miss M. Hope Dodds' suggestions that North Country amateurs would refuse to work as a team under an expert producer, I regard this as an aspersion on the common sense and loyalty of her fellow-country people and the North generally. I have, for example, never heard that the Durham Light Infantry regiments were particularly notorious for their mutineering tendencies. No intelligent producer wants "mere puppets." No intelligent play-production group, on the other hand, ought to put up with a puppet producer. Wherever the theatre is triumphant in the world to-day, the producer is the boss. But if your correspondent's inability to find a talented and authoritative producer is permanent and if the Durham amateurs are incapable of combining for the sake of the ensemble, the only remedy, it seems to me, is to give up all idea of producing drama and to limit their entertainment efforts to the presentation of variety bills, which ought to give scope to the more highly individualized genius of the "unbullyable" Northerners.

Yours faithfully

H. R. BARBOR

SHAKESPEARE IN MODERN DRESS

DEAR SIR,—Mr. Casson, in his interesting article on "Shakespearean Acting," compares the mentality of the Hamlet of Shakespearean times, who could plan and commit such a murder, and the Hamlet in modern dress, who, he says, would need to be twice as mad to do such a thing.

I find myself in agreement with Mr. Casson's article except on this point.

Eleven years ago—which one may reckon a short span of time compared to the centuries which have elapsed since Shakespeare wrote Hamlet—a young man of Hamlet's age (Hamlet, I believe, was supposed to be anything from sixteen to thirty), also a prince, killed Rasputin. Prince Yussupov was a young man of the world, wealthy, travelled, educated, living in the highest circles, with nothing abnormal in his mentality or appearance.

Rasputin was assassinated from motives of patriotism. Prince Yussupov, like Hamlet, had been thinking the matter over for some considerable time, and planning it all out carefully before he could bring himself up to the point.

No doubt, like Hamlet, he had qualms of the "to be or not to be" order.

It seems that, given sufficient incentive, Hamlets and Lady Macbeths and all the other Shakespearean characters will appear as of old: which is just another way of saying that Shakespeare drew characters which are immortal.

Yours truly,

(Miss) MARGARET BROWN.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

AN EXPERIMENT IN FEDERATION

The recent marked growth of interest in the drama, and the consequent increase in number of amateur societies, especially in the North of England, has led in York to an experiment which may be of interest to members of the British Drama League. After investigations and meetings lasting over two years, a body was formed called The Guild of York Players, which is an affiliation of the societies in York and district. The council, or governing body, of this Guild consists of a chairman, treasurer and secretary, together with two representatives from each of the seven affiliated societies, and the actual work is carried out by a series of sub-committees, to whom special duties are allotted.

The aim of this federation is to put on, at present, two plays a season of a type which would probably be difficult for the ordinary small amateur society to touch, and to draw its actors from the members of the affiliated societies. Individual members are accepted and can act if thought specially suited for parts, but the general policy is to draw as far as possible on the societies. Casts are settled by a casting committee, on which the majority of the societies have a member, and the wide choice thus offered should enable the plays produced to attain high standards of acting.

The society started with no funds; it was determined not to ask for subscribers till it had been proved that the Guild was worth subscribing to, and to rely on the sale of cheap tickets for income. To this end, and because of the lack of funds in hand, Clemence Dane's "A Bill of Divorcement" was decided on as a first production, sufficient money for a start being advanced by guarantors and loans from the affiliated societies. The acting and production of this play were described by a large press as considerably beyond the average amateur productions—and York is accustomed to set a high standard in these matters—but the audiences were so meagre that a loss of nearly £50 was shown on the five nights' performances.

A council meeting decided to have one more trial of the experiment and, backed again by an enthusiastic press, decided to do "Loyalties" as a free performance, making a collection for expenses. It was hardly hoped to do more than cover costs of the production, but it was felt that a second production would prove the justification or otherwise of such an organization as the Guild—the promoters of the scheme felt that such patient investigation as had gone to the building up of the edifice should not be shattered by a single blow of adverse fortune.

And they were justified. "Loyalties" played to packed houses of over 600 each night, with a collection averaging about 9½d. a head. The total takings were sufficient to pay the expenses of "Loyalties" and to remove the deficit which had resulted from "A Bill of Divorcement." The free performance idea will be continued next season, when it is hoped to build successfully on the foundation established this year.

Another object which is before this federation is the arrangement of dates between the societies which shall avoid the clashing of one performance with another—the need for this was shown when three societies played during one week, to the disadvantage of each of them.

Further uses of the Guild will arise as it grows, and next season the plays selected should approach more nearly to the type eventually aimed at—it is largely a question of finance which governs selection.

It may be that organizations similar to the Guild of York Players exist elsewhere, the need for some such union among societies of a district is certainly beyond dispute, but the difficulties are only too obvious, and the working is certainly not simple at the early stages.

If the cause of good drama is to be thereby advanced, and the standard of productions raised, no effort is too great to make such an experiment a working proposition.

A. I. CRISP.

BANK OF ENGLAND

The Bank of England Operatic and Dramatic Society on Saturday, February 10 and 11, gave performances of "Hay Fever" at King's Hall, Covent Garden. This is a difficult play for amateurs, as all the members of the Bliss family must prove themselves to be real human beings, but at the same time behave in such an exaggerated manner as to make this fact almost incredible. The right balance was well kept in this production and the cast are to be congratulated. The acting was good all round and a great deal of sincerity and hard work had evidently been put into it. Could not this Society, however, try its hand at something other than West End successes, which would test its power of originality?

THE DOUGLASS PLAYERS

The latest production by the Douglass Players was "She Stoops to Conquer" on Saturday, February 25 last.

The performance went with a swing and was much enjoyed both by the audience and the cast. Each member of the Company obviously had worked hard and had put his and her very best into the play with no thought of personal success. This play was excellent training in every way, for the costumes were home-made and even the wigs had been made by the producer who had had no previous experience in such work. More attention should be paid to make-up. Certainly comedy is notoriously difficult and it was easier for the Company to get a play such as "Everyman" over the footlights than this old comedy. With the exception of Mrs. Hardcastle the women were weaker than the men and needed more delicacy of touch—this, however, is entirely a matter of experience. It was impossible not to feel conscious of the smallness of the stage, etc., but it was a courageous experiment and one which was well justified by the results.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

CLIFTON ARTS CLUB DRAMATIC CONTEST

The Dramatic Contest of original plays held by the Clifton Arts Club last November again proved one of the chief events of the Bristol Dramatic season. Although this was only the second year of the Contest, entries were four times as large as previously, and plays were received from Scotland, Leeds, London, Oxford, Gravesend, Dover, Guernsey, Sherborne, Glastonbury, Warminster, Gloucester and Cheltenham, besides a large local entry which included no fewer than eight plays from the Club's own members. Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth very kindly undertook the preliminary adjudication, and awarded the Second Prize (for the best play, as read) to "Burnt Offering," by Mr. Daniel Roberts, of Gloucester; "Arson," by Mrs. E. F. Budgett (winner of the First Prize of the Contest in 1926) being placed second. He also selected the six plays which would compete in actual stage production for the First Prize. It should be mentioned that this constitutes the essential and unique feature of this Contest—that plays entered for the First Prize are judged solely by the success of their performance on the stage. Competitors may enter for both prizes, and those who are unable to arrange for the production of their plays in Bristol may enter for the Second Prize only: but the winner of the First Prize is the play which attains the greatest success not in MS., but in its proper medium, the stage.

The six plays were presented in competition in two groups of three on successive nights, and the best of each night, together with the best of the other four, were presented again in the Final on the third night. The excitement on the last night was intense, and the final award went to "When the Mist Comes Down."

The feature of the Contest was undoubtedly the judgment and criticism of Mr. Cyril Wood, Director of the Interlude Theatre Guild, who awarded the first prize. In addition to the onerous duties of Judge—which involved his close attention to every detail of the writing, production, staging and acting of nine separate performances—Mr. Wood delivered on each night a reasoned and expert criticism, the interest and value of which cannot be over-estimated. Plans for next year's Contest are already in hand, and the definite announcement may be expected shortly. In the meantime all particulars can be obtained from Mr. C. M. Haines (Hon. Sec. Dramatic Section, Clifton Arts Club), 1 Alexandra Road, Clifton, Bristol.

CALNE

The Calne Players, who have within the past year produced "The Rising Generation" and "Tilly of Bloomsbury," appeared on Leapyear Night and the following night at the Palace Theatre in "Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure." Walter Hackett's comedy revolves entirely round the title-rôle, and therefore make considerable demands on the leading character—an ordeal from which John D. Powell emerged with flying colours. The complicated business of the lighting was achieved without a hitch; and the entire production proved distinctly a feather in the cap of John Haddon and his assistants in the important work behind the scenes.

LEEDS CIVIC PLAYHOUSE

The production of "The Marvellous History of St. Bernard," staged by the Leeds Civic Playhouse on February 6, enjoyed gratifying popularity throughout its two weeks' run.

The production was in the presentational manner, and as far as possible the stage craft of the period when the play was written was adopted. There was no proscenium arch, no act drop and only one setting, which served to represent the various scenes in turn. Journeys were made in sight as on our own Elizabethan stage, and all simulation of external reality was sacrificed to the absorbing play. A photograph of the set is reproduced elsewhere.

This was the fifth production presented by the Civic Playhouse this season. The season opened with "The Rising Sun," produced by Miss Edith Craig. Next followed Romain Rolland's "Danton," under the direction of Mr. Norman Marshall, of the Festival Theatre, Cambridge. This play is pre-eminently marked out for amateur production on account of the great crowd needed for the Tribunal scene. In order more surely to spread the excitement of this scene, the mob was disposed about a series of steps leading from the stage to the auditorium, thus establishing an effective link between actors and audience. In December Galeworthy's "A Family Man" was staged; then "Anna Christie." After "St. Bernard" followed "Sowing and Reaping," and a ballet, "When Woods were Green." The season concluded with two dialect comedies "The Way of an Angel" (one act) and "The Devil a Saint," both by Mr. J. R. Gregson.

The season has been so remarkably successful that the Playhouse proposes to play for seventeen weeks next year, as compared with the present thirteen weeks. That this is no small achievement will be conceded when it is remembered that all the expenses of the theatre are met by voluntary offerings.

FREDK. H. SPENCER

STOKE-ON-TRENT

The Repertory Players of Stoke-on-Trent, with nine previous plays to their credit, all somewhat of the stock amateur-repertoire type, recently presented Sierra's "The Cradle Song" on a small stage at the Church Institute, Stoke. Taken as a whole the production was of extreme credit to the producer, to the designer of stage settings, and to the cast. The necessary reverence and quietude demanded of the Nuns had been obtained, but it must be added, not without a certain loss of individuality. The "make-up" of all the elder Sisters throughout and of the Doctor in Act II was too slight by many years, but no doubt the actors were afraid of the small hall. The production on the whole was both careful and artistic. Grouping tended occasionally to be diffused rather than compact, and there were several rather bad cases of "masking" which must somehow be avoided even on the smallest of stages. The Repertory Players are to be congratulated on a production which for four evenings brought beauty of form and word into the industrial sombreness of their town.

story of
anyhow
popularity

namer,
period
ere was
ne set-
scenes
on our
ion of
sorbing
roduced

by the
opened
Edith
olland's
orman
e. This
ar pro-
led for
spread
disposed
age to
re link
Gala-
; then
ollowed
When
d with
angel"
by Mr.

successful
venteen
present
vement
hat all
untary

NCER

, with
some-
type,
" on a
ken as
to the
and to
uietude
but, it
oss of
elder
or in
but no
l hall.
ful and
diffused
rather
emehow
stages.
d on a
beauty
ness of